

Matthew Patulski  
Parent, Grand Rapids Public Schools  
2733 Sinclair Ave NE  
Grand Rapids MI, 49505  
(616)361-3951

May 4, 2011

Hello, I am Matthew Patulski, a proud parent of a first grader and 4th grader at North Park Montessori Academy in the Grand Rapids Public Schools. I am here today to speak to the challenges of retaining and training teachers in specialized programs such as Montessori.

The Montessori Method is a robust 100+ year old pedagogy that provides children to young adults with an education that meets local, state and national standards for curriculum while developing those qualities that are key to success in the 21st century workplace: personal effectiveness, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution and negotiation, creative problem solving, strategic thinking and team building. creating adults who live life as engaged citizens at the local and global levels.

GRPS has a very successful Montessori PK-6 elementary program. Year over year we match or exceed scores of the local suburban schools in all of the standard tests. For the last two years, a group of GRPS parents, teachers and administrators have been working to reboot our secondary Montessori program. The primary challenge to the success of our program is the retention of a properly trained, professionally credentialed staff.

The US Department of Education recognizes several credentialing organizations for Montessori teachers, administrators and schools. The Grand Rapids Public Schools leadership recognizes this as a requirement for a successful program. Our parents expect it. Of course, our teachers are on board. The GREA leadership has publicly supported the need for programs such as ours to have a properly trained and credentialed teacher in our classrooms.

If everyone agrees, why can't we staff a school? Everyone has a different answer. But, it all comes down to this scenario: When two teachers are competing for an open position, and teacher A has a credentials but teacher B has no credentials and 1 more day on the job, teacher B gets the position. OK fine, those may be the rules, but at this point you have also lost the parents and the children to fill the classroom.

I grew up in a union family. I believe in the right of a group of professional individuals to collectively bargain. It establishes a floor in the workplace for wages and work conditions. However, in today's education staffing environment, components of this process are acting as a ceiling or a wall to block the optimal person from entering the classroom. There is a need for greater latitude for professional development, credentialing, and staff selection in building schools based on specialized models like Montessori, International Baccalaureate and University Prep.

Teachers are remarkable people. We all have 1 or 2 we will remember all of our lives. Everyday, they must engage our children on a personal level in a way that prepares them to be adult citizens while conducting themselves as professionals in the workplace. Current education policy sells these fine people short in that regard. As you consider the legislation before you, please take our concerns into account while also respecting the professionals who nurture all of our children.

Thank you.